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BEFORE THE SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS,
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES,
ON MOVING INTO A SECOND CENTURY OF SERVICE:
WORKING TO IMPROVE THE
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, good afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to testify today on exploring ways in which the National Park Service (NPS) might improve its workplace environment.

To borrow a well-used axiom, management would be easy if it weren't for the people. And NPS has an enormous challenge to address in the management of its people.

The work of the Office of Inspector General (OIG) offers ample evidence of this challenge: serious ethics violations and lapses by senior NPS officials, including the former NPS Director; little consequence for misconduct and poor judgment; an environment where harassment, discrimination, and reprisal are commonplace; disregard for travel and procurement rules; ineffective controls over funds provided to NPS from outside partnership and friends groups; ineffective oversight of grant funds; and lax fiscal governance. In the past, NPS leadership has failed to lead by example, failed to take action against wrongdoing, and failed to address its ineffective ethics program.

Changing this culture will be arduous. NPS has a legacy practice of hiring family and friends. Favoritism and sexism abound. The remote location of many parks limits diversity in applicant pools, and often blurs the boundaries between the work and personal lives of park employees. NPS' culture of silence and protecting its own has kept harassment, discrimination, and retaliation in the shadows. NPS is challenged by the independence of park superintendents and the influences of partnership, friends, and employee groups. Changing this culture in a historic bureau like NPS would be challenging in the best of times, but that challenge is intensified by contemporaneous discussion of drastic reorganization of NPS, its structure, and its leadership.

I can point to some indications of improvement in NPS' leadership: Acting Director Reynolds has been responsive to OIG reports, and has taken prompt corrective action where necessary and appropriate. He recently issued an all-employee memorandum, reminding NPS employees of their obligation to serve the public and NPS in a highly ethical, respectful, and transparent manner. The relatively new Ombuds Program is a promising practice for the Service to accept and address concerns and complaints by NPS employees. We have seen an increased involvement in change initiatives by Regional Directors. And NPS leadership has improved communications with both the Solicitor's office and the OIG.

But there is much more that needs to be done to change the culture in NPS. Specifically, NPS needs to make immediate changes to its Ethics Program. It has only one full-time ethics

counselor, making NPS the bureau with the worst ratio in the Department of the Interior. NPS would do well to change its ethics training requirements to cover all employees, or at least all employees at a GS-12 level or above. NPS should have a focused emphasis on ethics training and oversight for conflict-of-interest risks, risks that pervade the Service.

Management training for all NPS supervisors and managers needs to go beyond just dealing with sexual harassment. Providing the "Civil Treatment for Leaders" training that is being rolled out Department-wide, is one positive step. To the extent possible, more transparency in taking corrective action for misconduct would increase accountability and serve as a deterrent factor throughout the Service. The Service could benefit from an assessment—and consequent change in practice—of hiring practices and selection criteria for seasonal, term, and full-time permanent employees, as well as for promotions within the NPS. A thorough review and analysis of Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and other grievance settlements should inform NPS of its problem areas, and where it needs to focus some of its corrective attention. Controls and safeguards are needed for funds provided by outside support organizations to the parks, to make this funding transparent Service-wide to NPS leadership and, frankly, to Congress.

Finally, although the phrase "tone at the top" is often cited, it could not be more important for NPS and its future. NPS has top-level leadership nationwide, throughout its regions and icon parks. If these leaders are not modeling consistently good—indeed exemplary—conduct, NPS cannot expect its rank and file to do so. NPS has tolerated, maybe even encouraged, polarizing leadership at many levels. Going forward, NPS needs leadership that is not only unifying, but also models the very conduct that the Service would like to see in all of its employees. NPS needs leaders who are not only aware of their ethical obligations, but also apply and adhere to them, and hold others accountable to do the same.

This concludes my prepared testimony. I am happy to answer any questions that the subcommittee members may have.